

WHAT IS A PERFIN? - STATES SIDE

From Douglas Cutler.

(Ed.: Doug wrote this in October 1993, but the subject of "What Is A Perfin?" appeared to be getting out of hand even when only referring to G.B. stamps. Enough time has now lapsed for this article to be published without it dropping like a lead weight after all the comments about G.B. perfins. It does give a new slant to the subject from the American collectors.)

The article "What Is A Perfin?" in Bulletin 266 was very interesting and quite extensively covered all the aspects except one. In the USA we have an added problem to this question. The United States Post Office Department (USPOD) and the new United States Postal Service (USPS) have a definition of what a Perfin is listed in the Domestic Mails Manual (DMM) of these two different companies. This definition covers the size of the perforated holes (limited to a size of one half inch by one half inch). There is also a kind of unwritten rule that the Perfin would only be applied to definitive sized postage stamps. This comes from the rules that govern the use of Precanceled Stamps. While the use of Perfins in commemorative stamps was frowned upon, it was not banned as were Precanceled commemorative stamps. The only other thing that comes to mind - there was a phrase that pertained to the use of "letters, numerals, or other marks or devices, for identification purposes" as being lawful.

So, the question of whether or not U.S. Revenue Stamps with punches similar to Perfins in U.S. Postage Stamps are actually Perfins or not is limited to the definition by the USPOD and the USPS. There are no limitations expressed by either the USPOD or the USPS about Perfins for the purpose of stopping theft by employees. I do believe that the USPOD had a limitation about the Perfin being used for advertising purposes, but the USPS dropped this limitation in its DMM.

The two American Companies that dealt in the manufacture of Stamp Perforators were the American Perforator Company and the B.F. Cummins Company (now known as the Cummins-Allison Company). Both of these companies extensively advertised that the activity of Perforating Stamps would stop the theft of postage by employees

and the B. F. Cummins Company went so far as to establish a "Bureau of Identification" within the company. They used this as a selling point to prospective customers of their Perforating Machines for Postage Stamps.

While it is true that the USPOD and the USPS co-operated with these two companies whenever it was reported by a firm that was using Perforated Postage Stamps that a stock of Perforated Postage Stamps had been stolen, the USPOD and the USPS did not pursue the illegal use of Perforated Postage Stamps by unauthorised persons unless the complaint came from the firm that had actually perforated the Postage Stamps.

Only the personnel of the Postal Inspection Service would have had the rules and regulations pertaining to this problem and then only in the event of an actual complaint by a firm. The Postal Inspection Service is a separate branch of the USPOD and the USPS, but it still comes under the direction of the Postmaster General. The regular employees such as Postmasters, Postal Clerks, Mail Handlers, Letter Carriers, and Rural Mail Carriers would not have had specific directions to watch for this misuse unless a Postal Inspector was conducting an investigation and it just happened to be within the parameters of the mail that that employee was handling at the time of the investigation. Generally speaking, this only happens at the level of Mail Handler where very large amounts of mail are being handled at one time. Then, if an arrest is going to be made, the other employees may get involved, out only to verify that the mailpiece was picked up or delivered to a specific location: and then that employee may be asked to testify in court as to what transpired.

So, as you can see, what limits us in the United States as to "What Is A Perfin?" is the definition by the USPS as to the size limitations only. As to the Revenue type Perfins, these have to be identified as to whether or not they are an identification mark or an actual cancelling Perforation. Some of these cancelling Punches are so big that they may cover as many as fifty individual Revenue Stamps of definitive stamp size. This makes them very hard to illustrate in a catalog. An attempt is being made to catalog these "Perfins", but the end result will be many

years into the future I am afraid. The Perfins Club does have a "text" listing of these "Perfins", but no illustrations have been published. Although a working project has made significant gains in this field it is still in the draft stages.

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